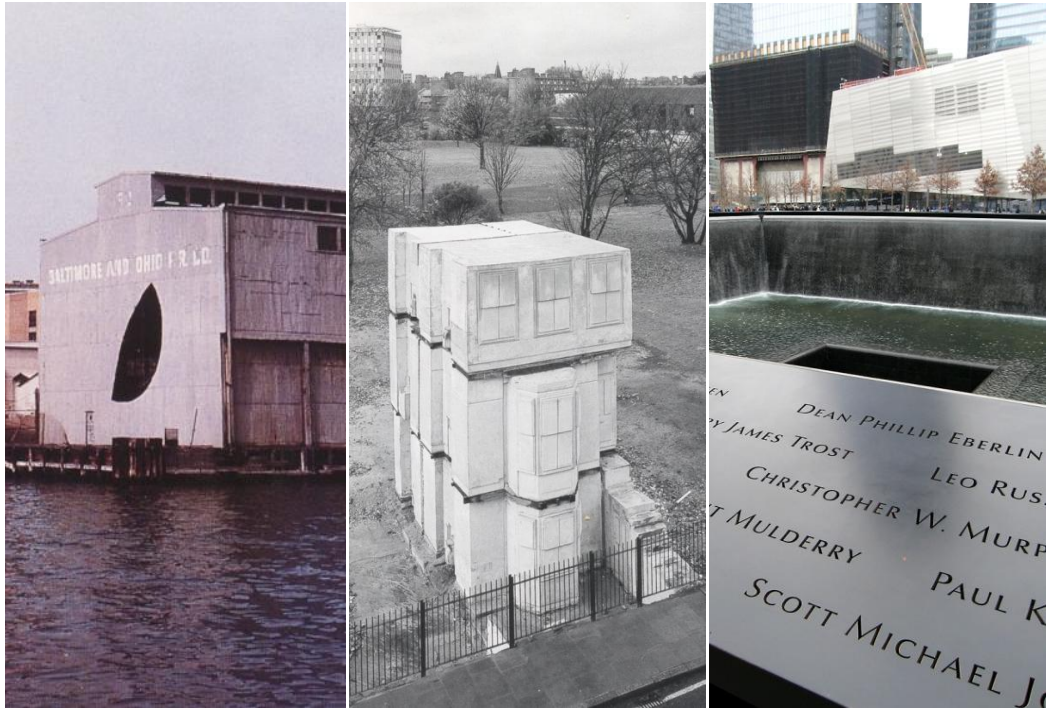


# Experiencing Unbuilding and In-Between Spaces: Analysing Works by Gordon Matta-Clark, Rachel Whiteread and Michael Arad



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## Abstract

Art and architecture have been used to invest politically contentious meaning into practices of urban unbuilding and the creation of in-between spaces.

This research seeks to understand examples of such work by critically reading the works of two artists and one architect: *Day's End* (1975) by Gordon Matta-Clark, *House* (1993) by Rachel Whiteread and National September 11 Memorial design (opened 2011) by Michael Arad. The investigation aims to deepen scholarly understanding by demonstrating how critical debate can connect art and architectural works and methodologies in sites and geographies of unbuilding and in-between spaces.

The methodology used in this investigation is a mixture of fine art analysis, architectural criticism and geographical theory, which reflects my experience in these areas. It seeks to weave together insights from a range of theorists who explore ideas of unbuilding, in-between spaces and embodied experience. It also draws on auto-ethnography and observational ethnographic methods used when doing field work at the National September 11 Memorial and other sites.

Of particular importance in such comparative analysis is first the manner in which all three works have responded to sites that are politically contentious, and second the way in which the artists and architect have sought to invest and give meaning to these urban spaces. These acts of

making meaning occur differently with each of the works, with the audience interpreting the works in a way that is different to the artist's and architect's initial aims.

This contribution to scholarship is significant because it shows how urban life; space and place; ownership and access; and politics can be addressed through works that involve unbuilding and in-between spaces. *Day's End, House* and the National September 11 Memorial design illustrate how artistic interventions into politically contentious places catalyse public debate about the events embedded in these sites.

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## Introduction

*COMPLETION THROUGH REMOVAL*

*COMPLETION THROUGH COLLAPSE*

*COMPLETION THROUGH EMPTINESS*

(Attlee & Feuvre 2003, p. 48)

*DESIGNING FOR COLLAPSE*

*... DESIGNING FOR ABSENCE*

(Sussman 2007, p. 21)

These sentences are fragments from roughly handwritten notes from the 1970s by American artist Gordon Matta-Clark and an artistic collective he belonged to called the Anarchitecture Group. These manifestos relate to the experimental ideologies and practices adopted by Matta-Clark and the group, whose members were concerned with removal from the built environment, ideas of entropy and the value of the leftover spaces between structures—all seen as complete architectural responses in themselves (Attlee & Feuvre 2003, p. 48 and 59; Marino 2004, p. 94; Attlee 2007).

The fascination with unbuilding and in-between spaces—among them ruins and voids—remains relevant. In this work, I will be using these terms as key conceptual elements of analysis. ‘Unbuilding’ defines acts of

demolition and the razing of structures to the ground (*Oxford English Dictionary* 2012). I will be applying this terminology to refer to destroyed buildings and their ruined aftermath. The term 'in-between spaces' is used to describe ruinscapes, spaces of absence, voids and the gaps between the forms of objects. The term 'built environment' as used in this thesis, refers to the human urban environment and structures.

I aim to extend the scholarly understanding of the importance of unbuilding and in-between spaces by examining a selection of art and architectural examples of such artistic and architectural strategies in politically charged sites in urban environments. The examples that have been chosen are Gordon Matta-Clark's piece *Day's End* (1975)<sup>1</sup>; the work *House* (1993) by British artist Rachel Whiteread; and the Israeli-American architect Michael Arad's National September 11 Memorial design (opened 2011), encompassing the surrounding landscape design by fellow American landscape architect Peter Walker and his firm PWP Landscape Architecture.

The topic under investigation reflects my experience in architecture, fine arts and cultural geography. In this manner it exemplifies cross-disciplinary research and its commitment to enhance dialogue and encourage new ways of thinking. The methodology used in this investigation is a mixture of fine art analysis, architectural criticism and geographical theory. It also draws on auto-ethnography and observational ethnographic methods used when doing

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<sup>1</sup> The work was also referred to as '*Day's Passing*' (Lee 2001, p. 118; Diserens 2003, p. 8).

field work at the National September 11 Memorial<sup>2</sup> (hereafter also referred to as ‘the Memorial’) and other sites. My analysis of the Memorial in chapter four draws on these experiences, alongside conversations I had with people who had recently visited the site. This research also weaves together insights from Georg Simmel, Edmund Burke, the Situationist International, Henri Lefebvre and Michel de Certeau, alongside the geographical theory of Edward Casey and Yi-Fu Tuan and place and space based theorists, Jeff Malpas and Nikos Papastergiadis. My analyses of the three works aims to extend this debate beyond the field of art, to creative areas such as architecture and design, as well as exploring new ways of seeing and understanding these environments through a geographical perspective.

The pieces by Matta-Clark and Whiteread are sound examples that show the aesthetic relevance of unbuilding and in-between spaces for understanding spaces and places in contemporary landscapes<sup>3</sup>. Their works have often been compared but there is, to the best of my knowledge, no such comparison yet with Arad’s Memorial design. In such light, the present work is an original

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<sup>2</sup> In order to conduct this field work, I applied for and secured ethics clearance to undertake qualitative research at the Memorial site. This allowed me to explore the effectiveness of the design through my own embodied experience, and by observing others interact with the site and work.

<sup>3</sup> There are many other art and architectural examples that appear to relate to these themes, including works by artists Robert Smithson and Cyprien Gaillard, which explore the destruction of structures; visual works associated with ruination by artists Jane and Louise Wilson and the Land Interpretation Center; or the architect James Wines, whose built constructions are reminiscent of eroded structures. Examples of pieces examining in-between spaces include: architectural work by Daniel Libeskind, such as the Jewish Museum in Berlin; drawings from the architect Lebbeus Woods; artistic pieces of memorialisation by Horst Hoheisel; artworks by Anish Kapoor and Christian Boltanski; or compositions by John Cage. I have chosen not to focus on these examples for they do not appear to represent equally all ideas discussed, and are not working directly with the built fabric of the urban environment; or, as in the case of Libeskind’s Jewish Museum, their works have been examined in depth already.

and timely contribution to scholarship, apt because it is also a relevant example of all kinds of structural undoing associated with the World Trade Center site and the use of voids within the design. Of particular importance in such comparative analysis is the manner in which all three works have responded to sites that are politically contentious, and the way in which the artists and architect have sought to invest meaning in these urban spaces. These acts of making meaning occur differently with each of the works. Matta-Clark's *Day's End* was an illegal and unfunded intervention in which the artist trespassed on property to reclaim and politicise urban spaces. Whiteread's *House* was officially supported—her project was funded by an arts organisation that allowed her aesthetic freedom, but did not involve the public in the creation of the piece, and provoked myriad reactions from them. Arad's design for the 9/11 Memorial Pools was also officially supported; designed from an official brief and with various governing bodies overseeing the work to ensure the design represented the trauma of the site and the feelings of the public. Nevertheless, it has also been highly provocative. In comparative and contrasting terms, these three works intervene in politically charged sites. Specifically, they evoke awareness of diverse issues about urban life; space and place; ownership and access; and the politics that affect and give effect to those issues and sites. At least part of the reason for their selection for analysis derives from the works themselves, but also arises because of the ways in which audiences have come to participate in and read the works' aesthetics and political narratives of place.

Matta-Clark's work followed from architectural studies at university and encompassed sculpture, performance art, photography and film. He typically created works referred to as 'building cuts', which consisted of cutting and removing sections using power tools, generally from unused buildings. This practice of removing parts of structures created voids within the fabric of buildings; flattening and reconfiguring the forms and spatial relationship of walls, floors and ceilings. Matta-Clark stated that he was 'working with absence' and presenting an 'opening up view ... to the invisible' (Sussman 2007, pp. 21–22). The structures that Matta-Clark used to create his building cuts were often listed for demolition. All of these works and structures have since been removed. What remains of Matta-Clark's larger works are photographic collages and films that recorded both the making of the works and the finished pieces. The visual recordings of demolished pieces are articulated in a manner that emphasises Matta-Clark's values and ideas, and allow some understanding of the artist's process. They also serve as a form of recognition and preservation of his works and ideas (Wines 1987, p. 136).

*Day's End* was created in an abandoned warehouse in New York's waterfront area. It has been selected for analysis here because of the illegal nature of the work; political narratives associated with the piece; and the manner in which the work was embedded within the existing fabric of the city. There were other works of Matta-Clark's that could have been selected, including his piece *Conical Intersect* (1975), but this work was a commissioned work for the 1975 Biennale de Paris (Paris Biennale). *Day's End* is a significant work to

compare to the other examples analysed for the manner in which it reflected the themes of subversion and politicisation of place. Matta-Clark's work with the Anarchitecture Group could also be explored on the grounds that it examined ideas informing removal from the built environment, entropy, and the value of the leftover spaces between structures. On one occasion that uncannily anticipates the need for Arad's later work, Matta-Clark created pieces that explored the spaces between the original Trade Towers, and suggested erasing the buildings by crossing out the structures with an 'X' (Lee 2001, p. 107 and 109; Marino 2004, p. 95). The works of the Anarchitecture Group were often ephemeral or performance pieces that were not embedded within the built fabric of the city, and therefore are not relevant to the overall themes within the thesis.

Whiteread's works are also concerned with the urban context and aspects of unbuilding and in-between spaces. Her sculptural pieces are records of spatial voids; examining absent bodies and lived traces, and considering the spatial inhabitation of the world (Gross 2004, p. 38 and 41; Townsend 2004, p. 8; *The Eye: Rachel Whiteread* 2005; Saltzman 2006, p. 90; Pesenti 2010, p. 9). Whiteread's practice began in the 1990s and predominantly consists of inverted casts of objects and structures, creating minimal forms from the surrounding and in-between spaces of the objects. The artist's work explores juxtapositions and collisions of absence and presence; solid and void; past and future; public and private; temporary and permanent; and aesthetic and historical relevance (Morgan 1997, p. 19; Townsend 2004, p. 33; Tate Gallery

2010). Whiteread's work is often mentioned in relation to gestures that represent personal, everyday and sometimes biographical moments within spaces (Gross 2004, p. 41; Lawson 2004, p. 75; Dezeuze 2011; Harrison 2012). The artist's solidification of voids is explored in drawings and other two-dimensional work, which are often studies of in-between spaces used to compliment her sculptures. Both sculptural pieces and two-dimensional works introduce 'new spaces for recollection' from the layers of histories and memories that have inhabited the spaces (Lawson 2004, p. 74).

Whiteread's *House* was situated in London and was a complete concrete cast of an original tenement house. It exemplifies studies of spatial absence, and has a strong connection to the lived moments of place. Various examples of Whiteread's other works could also be examined here. This includes *Demolished* (1996), a work consisting of twelve screen-printed panels that observe the formalistic qualities of the collapse of three residential tower blocks as they are demolished. Nevertheless, the series is not embedded within the urban fabric, as *House* was. *Holocaust Memorial* (2000) is another piece that is part of a city environment and considers ideas associated with unbuilding and in-between spaces. However, it is not strongly connected to the site, being a constructed concrete cube from various casts of architectural elements, formed in a manner to give the impression of a full-sized room.

Arad's design for the National September 11 Memorial is his first work as principal architect and is an object made to have a compelling relationship to

the place. The Memorial is primarily<sup>4</sup> in response to the lives lost on September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 (9/11) as a result of acts of terrorism, which included the destruction of the World Trade Center—an act of unbuilding in itself. Opened in 1973 and designed by Minoru Yamasaki, the Center was then the tallest building in the world and a symbol of political and economic power (Paperny 2012, p. 46). The destruction of the Center's two Towers was a tragic visual spectacle. The event left a void in the urban fabric that arguably had an effect more powerful than evoked by the buildings (Kamin 2010, p. 5).

As a gesture to resilience and remembrance an architectural competition was held to redesign and rebuild the Trade Center. The winning masterplan design, by architect Daniel Libeskind, appeared to balance corporate and public sentiment by offering a mixture of commercial opportunities and commemorative functions (Kamin 2010, p. 3). To remember 9/11, another competition was held to design a memorial as part of Libeskind's masterplan. The winning entry for the National September 11 Memorial was by Arad, with the surrounding park design by Peter Walker's firm PWP Landscape Architecture. The Memorial consists of two pools based on the footprints of the Towers, introducing spatial voids as a device to represent the fatalities and other effects of absencing that have arisen from 9/11—not least among them a sense of security. The Memorial opened on the tenth anniversary of

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<sup>4</sup> The National September 11 Memorial displays the names of people who died in connection to the terrorist act on the World Trade Center. The Memorial also includes the names of others who died at the Pentagon and in the flights of the September 11 attacks, and in the February 26, 1993 bombing of the Trade Center buildings.



9/11, with the rest of the masterplan design under construction for years to come.

In chapter one I introduce the conceptual framework of the thesis by examining unbuilding within the contemporary built environment alongside ideas regarding in-between spaces and embodied experience. I refer to sociologist Georg Simmel's 1911 essay 'The Ruin' and argue that the Romantic concept of the ruin as he outlines it, now does not best represent modern day ruinscapes and places of unbuilding. I next draw on Edmund Burke's ideas of terror and the sublime, and then examine theories promulgated by members of the Situationist International regarding in-between spaces in the built environment and the ways in which art can reclaim these spaces. I conclude the chapter by circumscribing the meaning of 'space' and 'place' and ideas associated with embodiment in the thesis. This brings together the aforementioned ideas about ruin, terror and the sublime, referencing the notion that place is embodied and that we experience these various modes, sites and registers corporeally. Such experience affects the manner in which we have come to read and understand works on unbuilding and the in-between spaces.

Chapter two focuses on Matta-Clark and *Day's End*. I begin by outlining the artist's work, which was concerned with the in-between spaces of the city and focused on how art interventions can reclaim these places; recalling the ideas of the Situationist International and understanding his work through

the conceptual framework of chapter one. Matta-Clark's practice is examined in regard to the ideas associated with unbuilding, the performance aspect of the making of his works and the experience of his pieces in an urban context. The chapter ends by contemplating the experience of the artwork and reflecting on how the site exists today.

Whiteread's sculpture *House* is examined in chapter three. The chapter begins with an introduction to the artist's work, again referring to the conceptual framework. Comparisons between Whiteread's and Matta-Clark's work include discussion on the subversive nature of *Day's End*, and how this contrasts with the way *House* was funded by an arts organisation. I also consider the aesthetical nature of void within *House* and how this compares to the spatial absence in *Day's End*. I particularly focus on the way that Whiteread's sculpture became a symbol of the social and economic landscape through audience interpretation and participation with the piece, despite her intentions for the work.

The site of the World Trade Center in New York became a place of unbuilding as a result of the acts of 9/11. In chapter four, I analyse this transformation of place and the design by Arad for the National September 11 Memorial. This chapter also includes reference to the ideas discussed in chapter one, and comparisons made to the aesthetics of the spatial voids in this work, with those in Matta-Clark's and Whiteread's pieces. The chapter first provides an introduction to the iconic Trade Towers and recounts the events of 9/11

with reference to ruinscapes and the sublime. Arad's Memorial design is then described, and I conclude by examining how the Memorial is experienced and ask whether the design does reflect Arad's intentions for a site of memory and support, given the nature of working to a brief with the work. At various points I consider differences that characterise *Day's End, House* and the Memorial Pools.

## Chapter One

# Understanding Unbuilding, In-Between Spaces and Embodied Experience

The following chapter outlines the concepts of unbuilding, in-between spaces and embodied experience that relate to urban environments through which examples of works by Matta-Clark, Whiteread and Arad will be analysed in the subsequent chapters. First I examine the process of unbuilding and structural destruction which is associated with research on ruination, and seek to differentiate its contemporary experience from the common Romantic perception of ruins by reference to Georg Simmel's essay 'The Ruin' ('Die Ruin: Ein Asthetischer Versuch', 1911<sup>5</sup>).

Simmel's extensively circulated text encapsulates notions concerning Romantic ruination that contrast with visual understandings of ruins within the contemporary built environment. His ideas on the aesthetic pleasures of ruins produced by means of natural decay are still widely referred to (Roth, Lyons & Merewether 1997, p. 5; Woodward 2002; Boym 2007; Dillion 2010; Huyssen 2010). During the period when Simmel was writing, Romantic ruins were seen as objects of beauty, nostalgia and melancholy, representing a connection between the past and the future (Roth, Lyons & Merewether 1997, p. 25; Woodward 2002, pp. 2–3; Boym 2007), and evoking

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<sup>5</sup> Published in *Philosophisches Kultur*, Leipzig: Kroner.

pleasant feelings. These feelings and reminiscences for times past were said to emphasise the slow pace at which ruination took place and to underscore the natural processes of erosion (Roth, Lyons & Merewether 1997, pp. 4–5). Simmel certainly regarded the disintegration of a building as symbolic of the collaboration between constructed environments and natural landscapes<sup>6</sup> from which built objects derived (Roth, Lyons & Merewether 1997, p. 5; Boym 2007). Simmel (1965, pg. 259) described the process of ruination as ‘shifts in favour of nature’ through which structures returned to their originating states. He argued that nature is always a part of the built object: ‘in its material, and its given state, it has always remained nature; and now nature becomes once more completely master over it’ (Simmel 1965, pp. 262–263)<sup>7</sup>. Notably, structural materials such as steel, glass and concrete decay at rates different from those for stone and timber—materials prevalent in Romantic ruins (Boym 2007; Huyssen 2010, p. 27). Contemporary ruinscapes seem disconnected from the natural environment by the manner and speed of their destruction in the urban environment (Smith 2006, p. 134; Belpoliti 2010, p. 180), as a result of warfare or demolition for development for example (Edensor 2005, p. 17; Bevan 2007, p. 4 and 62).

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<sup>6</sup> Although the meaning of the term ‘natural environment’ is now much debated within theoretical and visual arts communities, for now I will be referring the meaning of the term which existed when Simmel was active.

<sup>7</sup> In his 1934 essay ‘The Pleasures of Limestone’, Adrian Stokes (2011, pp. 24–26) expressed the Romantic feelings of beauty for the decaying structure through the materiality of the object. In this case the qualities of limestone were spoken of, with emphasis on the intimate nature of the stone as it breaks down (Huyssen 2010, p. 27).

Advances in technology play a part in how contemporary ruins are made; for example, by means of direct and large physical impacts resulting from modern weaponry. Technological advances in the mass media have increased our collective witnessing of ruination, and that changes the ways in which people relate to and perceive ruins. Whereas in the Romantic period, people would appreciate the erosion of a building as a gradual departure from its original form, in a contemporary context, unbuilding is now associated with a fast-paced destruction and is a reminder of our transience. Speaking about the deliberate destruction of the Mostar Bridge in the war in Bosnia during the 1990s, Croatian writer Slavenka Drakulic emphasised such associations when observing that ‘perhaps we see our own mortality in the collapse of the bridge’ (Bevan 2007, p. 26).

Witnessing ruins arising from traumatic events can induce feelings of sublimity—in this sense, awe—because viewing acts of accelerated destruction is capable of widening the separation between the self and the overwhelming nature of the event (Burke & Boulton 1958; Ray 2005, p. 1). This short distance between awe and terror is elemental to Edmund Burke’s analysis in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), one of the first works to examine the contradictory nature of the sublime aesthetic. In *A Philosophical Enquiry*<sup>8</sup> Burke explains the sublime as a feeling so overwhelming that one becomes dislocated from

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<sup>8</sup> Philosopher Immanuel Kant concurred with Burke’s theories on the sublime’s relationship to terror. He discusses his ideas on this notion in the 1790 text *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (Battersby 2007, pp. 23–29).

the object of the moment and focuses on the power of the feeling. In the case of terror, Burke sees the corresponding emotion of fear being the most prominent feeling creating this overwhelming presence. He argues that terror is a fundamental device of the sublime (Burke & Boulton 1958).

In peacetime or in moments of conflict, unbuilding within the contemporary landscape seems to be associated with political or politicised sites connected to tragic, social and economic factors. These ruins do not seem to have a peaceful 'return to nature', as Simmel suggested. Nor are events and memories associated with sites of ruination readily forgotten and replaced with nostalgic narratives. Contemporary unbuilding challenges the aesthetics of beauty and can evoke feelings of trauma. The immediacy of unbuilding in the contemporary landscape presents new void-like spaces, in-between the whole forms of the built remains. These left-over gaps and spatial voids encourage the audience to 'fill in' and 'complete' these spaces through their subjective interpretations made by way of bodily participation in the spaces (Boym et al. 2006).

To exemplify how to approach these in-between urban spaces *analytically* I first refer to selected ideas of the French collective, the Situationist International (1957-1962), and to one of the principals of the group, Guy Debord. Members of Situationist International were particularly interested in the in-between spaces of the city and used the surrounding environment and happenings taking place to shape these spaces (McDonough 2004a, p. xii).

The Situationist saw the city as an example of the controlled 'consumption of everyday life' (Marcus 2004, p. 8), with the left-over gaps as spaces for 'positive' interpretation (Chtcheglov 1989, p. 3; Kotanyi, A and Vaneigem 1989, p. 67). The collective would construct 'situations' through visual explorations, with the intent of reclaiming public spaces from bureaucratic authorities and private ownership. Through these interventions within the in-between gaps of the urban environment, the collective challenged ideas regarding ownership, access and 'rights of the city' (Andreotti 2004, p. 224).

When it came to sites of ruination in the built environment, the collective was 'not interested in the charms of ruins'; rather its members related to the manner in which ruination at the site stood for larger scale social, cultural and spatial ruinations (McDonough 2004b, p. 260). It advocated the value of spaces empty of objects and activities, claiming that within the absence of these forms there is 'a presence one can feel' (Chtcheglov 1989, p. 3). These types of spaces were parts of temporal and fragmented transitional landscapes, created by means of the manner in which one travelled through them. The Situationist International aimed to explore self-constructed narratives based on emotional journeys and a 'unity of atmosphere' within these spaces<sup>9</sup> (Andreotti 2004, p. 222; McDonough 2004b, p. 246 and 252).

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<sup>9</sup> A small group of Debord's, known as the Letterist (which developed in to Situationist International), introduced the term '*dérive*' to describe the unplanned walks and chance encounters particularly through urban places. These rambles focussed on observing the effects of the 'ambience' of the spaces journeyed through (Jappe 1999, p. 59).



These types of journeys were a psychogeographical<sup>10</sup> way of moving and thinking, and also functioned to question the inherent value of those in-between spaces (McDonough 2004b, p. 260).

Inherent value is examined in other ways in *The Fate of Place* (1998), in which Edward Casey describes some of the understandings of what makes a void, including transcendental, spiritual and mathematical interpretations of these spaces. Explorations of these understandings of the void have a long tradition in aesthetic theory in visual art and architecture. The spatial absences that arise from the creation of the void have been employed by artists for various purposes ranging from visual puns to evoking a sense of the spiritual or the ineffable (Levy 2005, p. 1; Dezeuze 2011); while absences within architecture and design have often been incorporated as symbolic gestures to ideas of loss, but also to evoke a sense of balance and order.

The notion of space as something that is invested with meaning continues ideas associated with the void, and is developed by theorists such as Henri Lefebvre, Yi-Fu Tuan and Michel de Certeau. The term 'space' has developed from a geometric and mathematical understanding of the word, into interpretations of social space (Lefebvre 1991, p. 1). The contemporary understanding of 'space' and its relationship to the idea of 'place' will be referred to in this research. Tuan (2001, p. 136) interprets this question as

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<sup>10</sup> The term 'psychogeography' was defined by Debord (1989, p. 5) as 'the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals'.

‘space is transformed into place as it acquires definition and meaning’. In *The Production of Space* (1991), Lefebvre refers to ‘space’ as being more than a geometric and mathematical understanding of the world or a container; rather it is an active area that is defined by participation within an area (Burgin 1996, p. 27; Williams 2005, p. 115; Wolfel 2008, p. 66). De Certeau (2002, p. 117) exemplifies this idea, explaining how the urban environment is transformed by the simple act of people walking in the street— ‘space is practiced place’ and engenders a sense of place. Space and place thus understood implicate lived body interactions and experiences. In *Getting Back to Place* (1993), Casey continually emphasises the idea of the lived body being inherently connected to and making place: ‘*bodies build place*’ (Casey 1993, p. 116); ‘just as there is no place without body — without the physical or psychical traces of body — *so there is no body without place*’ (Casey 1993, p. 104); and finally ‘the knowledge of place begins with the bodily experience of being-in-place’ (Casey 1993, p. 46). This view reinforces the notion that the ‘body is a ‘lived body’ and space is humanly constructed space’ (Tuan 2001, p. 35). This is a sentiment that anthropologist Marc Augé (1995, p. 81) defines as an ‘anthropological place’, extending Lefebvre’s, Tuan’s and De Certeau’s understanding of space.

Philosopher Jeff Malpas extends these ideas of the spatial and place-based theory, emphasising the notion of space gaining a sense of place through bodily participation. Malpas (1998, p. 33) refers to Martin Heidegger’s phenomenological theories of ‘being-in’ the world (*dasein*), which suggests

that this is a fundamental part of what makes one human; 'being-in' is fully connecting to a place through the body, rather than just existing within it, and is more than 'the sense of physical containment that is part of the modern conception of space' (Malpas 1998, p. 33). De Certeau's (2002, p. 118) work parallels Malpas' idea of the spatial as embodied, and summarises the importance of subjective narratives in forming a sense of place: 'stories ... carry out a labour that consistently transforms spaces into places. They organise the play of changing relationships between places and spaces'.

Embodied experiences are formed through activities and narratives in space. Art and design can contribute to such experiences of recognition and interaction, and can give positive meaning to the urban environment and enable a sense of place. In this context, cultural theorist Nikos Papastergiadis (2006, p. 54) refers to 'the dynamics of relational processes' to introduce art's relationship to politics:

Art does not just express the stated meanings of a particular political movement, it participates in the construction of meaning ... it takes an active part in the production of meaning in contemporary culture.

*Day's End, House* and the National September 11 Memorial are examples of how works invest and give meaning to such politically contentious urban spaces.

The foregoing discussion has sought to explain ideas associated with unbuilding, in-between spaces and embodied experience. This has been done through discussion of contemporary ruination; the value of in-between spaces; concepts of 'space' and 'place; and how these are experienced through the lived body and invest meaning in urban spaces. In following chapters this conceptual framework will be applied to examples of urban unbuilding and in-between spaces as these manifest in the works of Matta-Clark, Whiteread and Arad. Considering their comparable and contrasting investments in political meaning in place-based but space-annihilating works, I pay attention to their different methods of design, their engagement with sites, funding regimes, publics, and affects. I also consider how these works and their interpretation invoke diverse and embodied experiences of a sense of place.

## Chapter Two

### **Matta-Clark: An Artist Making Spaces into Places**

Gordon Matta-Clark's body of work typically consisted of cutting and removing sections from generally unused buildings. These 'building cuts' introduced a spatial flattening and playful experimentation with negative spaces such that the resultant voids spatially reconfigure the remaining structural forms. Matta-Clark was 'drawn to remaking, to the steps of destruction, and to the in-between of the ruin; he was an artist who liked detritus'; his work 'materialises as a slippage between the actions of cutting destroying, and building from rubble and trash' (Sussman 2007, pp. 16–17). Matta-Clark's work also reflected ideas about the need to reclaim social spaces and acknowledge gaps in the built environment (Lee 2001; Attlee & Feuvre 2003; Marino 2004; Attlee 2007; Sussman 2007). In this chapter a close analysis is made of Matta-Clark's large urban intervention *Day's End* (1975), which refers to aspects of unbuilding and in-between spaces, and which highlights the relationships among the audience, the piece and the site. The subversive manner in which the work was formed also reflects Matta-Clark's interest in the Situationist's agenda to reclaim urban spaces through art; *Day's End* will also be explained in this regard.

Common to many of Matta-Clark's works are embodied experiences of unbuilding and in-between spaces. The artist aimed to present new ways of reading disintegrating structures by the practice of removal (Attlee & Feuvre 2003, pp. 72–73); this process of making by unmaking was as important to the aesthetic affect of his works as the finished objects. In this regard, Matta-Clark expressed an interest in artworks enhancing ruined spaces, and valued and claimed these places. In *Day's End*, he used the shell of the ruined building as a frame to create his own works, his 'cuts' being elements of unbuilding in themselves. Matta-Clark's method of 'building cuts' has been criticised as violent (Papadakis et al. 1989, p. 137; Lee 2001, p. 28; Attlee & Feuvre 2003, p. 30; Attlee 2007). Art historian Pamela Lee (2001, p. xv) disagrees with this evaluation, claiming that Matta-Clark's process of removing pieces of the built structures was delicate, in contrast to more typical practices whereby buildings are demolished by wrecking balls.

Matta-Clark's aestheticisation of ruins was instrumentally connected to his political ideas about the 'rights of the city', and linked to an ideology that art (and artists) should claim these spaces and enhance the liveability of the urban environment. On this position, he noted that:

Work with abandoned structures began with my concern for the life of the city of which a major side effect is the metabolization of old buildings. Here as in many urban centres the availability of empty and neglected structures was a prime textural reminder of the ongoing fallacy of renewal through modernization. The omnipresence of emptiness, of abandoned housing and

imminent demolition gave me the freedom to experiment with the multiple alternatives to one's life in a box as well as popular attitudes about the need for enclosure (quoted in Crimp 2010).

In the 1970s Matta-Clark did not see the ruins in urban centres as places of beauty slowly 'returning to nature', as might have Simmel and the Romantics. To Matta-Clark, such places were not representative of nostalgic narratives and pleasant memories; rather, for him the ruinscape and creative interventions in it related to the idea of the city as an 'oeuvre' in itself, formed through group actions and art interventions to create a sense of ownership of a place. Gerry Hovagimyan (who helped Matta-Clark create some of his 'building cut' works) emphasised the impact of the Situationists' ideas on Matta-Clark, recalling:

We used to talk about the Situationists all the time ... it's about making a Spectacle on the streets — you own it, it's yours. If you make a gesture it's only to alert the world to what's going on (Attlee & Feuvre 2003, p. 27).

In this sense, Matta-Clark chose to 'deal directly with social conditions whether by physical implication, as in most of [his] building works, or through more direct community involvement' (Doherty 2009, p. 33). His acts of unbuilding had a deliberately political intent: 'by undoing a building there are many aspects of social conditions against which I am gesturing' (quoted in Lee 2001, p. 26); this is evident in *Day's End*.

The piece was created in the metal façade of a large abandoned warehouse on pier 52, Gansevoort Peninsular, at the end of Gansevoort Street and West Street in lower, Manhattan, New York City. The site and buildings were owned by the New York City Sanitation Department and Matta-Clark did not have permission to install his work, rendering the project illegal (Lee 2001, p. 119; Diserens 2003, pp. 8–12; Sussman 2007, p. 28). The decaying building that became *Day's End* was positioned on a constructed pier, hovering on the zone between the Hudson River and the edge of the land. Matta-Clark emphasised a need for creative works to change that area, known as a 'muggers paradise' (Lee 2001, p. 121) and a dangerous and unwelcoming place (Diserens 2003, p. 12; F Maclachlan 2012, pers. comm., 30 August). Through *Day's End*, Matta-Clark aimed to rescue what he described as 'base mismanagement of a dying harbor and its ghost-like terminals' (Diserens 2003, p. 12).

The decline of Pier 52 and surrounds began after World War Two. Until then, buildings on the pier had been continuously leased by a number of transportation companies for around a seventy year period (Lee, 2001, p. 119). Activity on the pier and adjacent areas declined because of increases in the use of more efficient transportation options, such as air and rail (Lee, 2001, p. 119). Over time many large industrial sheds and other structures were abandoned. The economic downturn in America during the 1970s meant there were no funds to demolish the ruins (Weinberg 2012). Hidden



and disregarded places, such as the pier, were then claimed for various counter-cultural and illegal activities (Weinberg 2012).

Matta-Clark's focus was a nineteenth century steel and corrugated tin structure. It was a large space, measuring 180 metres in length, 20 metres wide and up to 15 metres tall. Matta-Clark chose this structure because he could create a large art work embedded in the city. He was attracted to the 'personalities' of the façades on the pier and 'wanted to deal with one of the earlier ones ... a turn of the century façade. There's the classic sort of tin classicism [to it]' (quoted in Crimp 2010).

Matta-Clark completed the 'building cuts' over a two month period by securing the area with his own locks (Diserens 2003, p. 8). During that time the derelict, dark and stained interior of the warehouse was transformed into a majestic cathedral-like structure (Crimp 2010) (Figure 1).

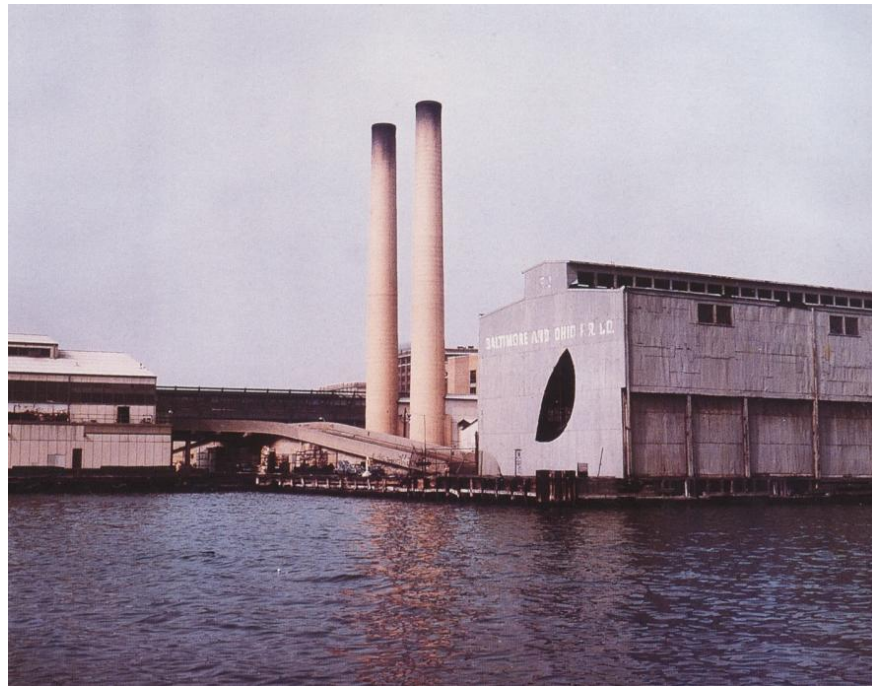


Figure 1. Gordon Matta-Clark, *Day's End*, 1975, cibachrome colour photograph, 109.2 x 109 cm

Matta-Clark achieved this affect by cutting an enormous crescent shape into the metal cladding of the shed; 'a new rose window' as he coined it (Diserens 2003, p. 19) (Figures 2 and 3). This spatial void in the façade of the building was complimented by two other curved 'cuts'—one in the top corner of the warehouse, and the other in the floor—that revealed the water of the Hudson below the pier (Figure 4). These three cuts pierced through the fabric of the decaying structure, allowing cascades of light to penetrate the darkened interior. The 'cuts' introduced spatial voids forming part of an overall shape which the artist articulates as 'sickle shapes or cyclical shapes-circles sections or sickles' (Diserens 2003, p. 178). By this description, Matta-Clark is referring to a hammer and sickle—a symbol associated with Communism

and representing workers and peasants and a new society free from oppression (Collins English Dictionary 2012). It appears that Matta-Clark was only commenting on this shape because of aesthetical reasons, though it does allude to a symbolic meaning of the form given the political nature of the site.

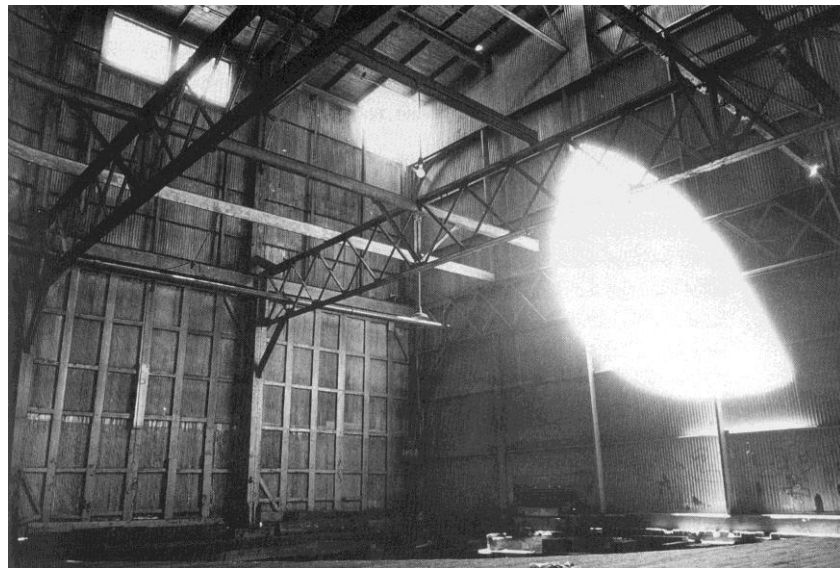


Figure 2. Gordon Matta-Clark, *Day's End*, 1975



Figure 3. Gordon Matta-Clark, *Day's End*, 1975



Figure 4. Gordon Matta-Clark, *Day's End*, 1975

Matta-Clark's choice for the location and shape of the cuts in the façade of the building was based on his embodied experiences within the space. He spent some time watching the progression of the light across the floor of the building, contemplating the relationship between the sun and the earth (Diserens 2003, p. 178). The result was the 'three arcs intersecting and forming that shape, what we call spherical section, in a stylization of a spherical surface' (Diserens 2003, p. 178) (Figure 5). As the name of the work suggests, towards the end of the day the voids introduced the full and setting sun into the building (Lee 2001, p. 122; Diserens 2003, p. 178).

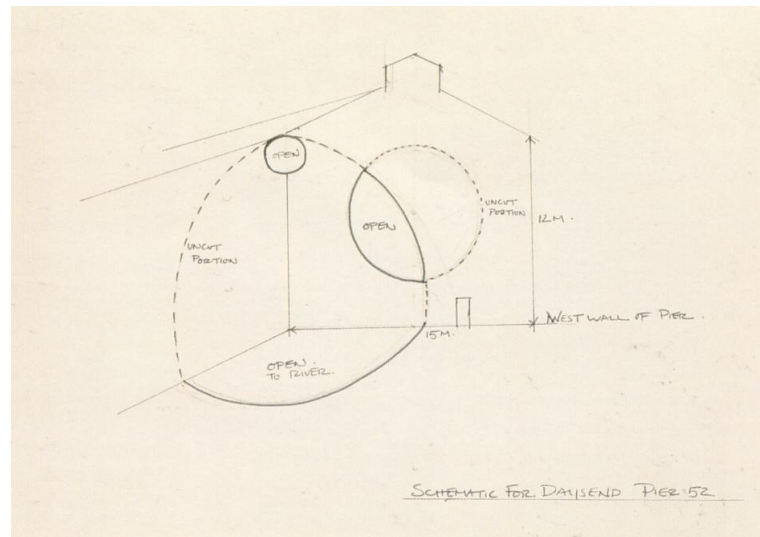


Figure 5. Gordon Matta-Clark, schematic drawing for *Day's End*, 1975, pencil and black ink on paper, 23 x 28 cm

The piece emphasised the relationships between light and dark, solid and void, and appeared to achieve an uplifting and cosmic affect (*Gordon Matta-Clark: Day's End* 1975; Sussman 2007, p. 29). The spatial reconfigurations of the warehouse combined the interior and exterior by means of 'light, air, sky and water', with the area becoming 'alive with motion and light' (Diserens 2003, p. 11). Art critic Donald Crimp (2010) describes the manner in which the external climatic elements responded with the internal space of the building, made possible by Matta-Clark's 'cuts':

During the afternoon the sun shines through a cat's-eye-like 'rose window' in the west wall. At first a sliver and then a strongly defined shape of light continues to wander into the wharf until the whole pier is fully illuminated at dusk. Below the rear 'wall-hole' is another large quarter circle cut opening the floor of the south-west corner to a turbulent view of the Hudson water.

In this manner the industrial shed was made monumental; connected to the climatic elements through the spatial voids, the internal atmosphere in the building emphasised the vulnerability of the body in relation to the space and cosmic power of the surrounding phenomena. Thus the role of scale in *Day's End* is also apparent, with Matta-Clark and others dwarfed by the enormity of the void and the space (Lee 2001, p. 140).

The physicality required to make *Day's End* is another and noteworthy aspect of embodiment in and through the work itself. Images show Matta-Clark in a harness dangling in the air as he peels back the metal surface and creates the large indexical form in the end of the building (Figure 6). A video of the construction of the work shows Matta-Clark wrestling with a thick timber floor beam as it comes undone from the fabric of the shed and falls into the sea below; bobbing gently up and down with the movement of the water (*Gordon Matta-Clark: Day's End* 1975). The construction of each of the voids in the building is itself a performance and closely connected to the revealed forms.



Figure 6. Gordon Matta-Clark in harness working on *Day's End*, 1975

Matta-Clark's void forms invite the surroundings into new spaces, reconstructing how one reads the building and introducing new ways of seeing. Such spatial possibilities in Matta-Clark's work invite others to create their own narratives by engaging with the pieces and establishing their own interpretations of place, and variously recall Tuan, Lefebvre, De Certeau, Casey and Malpas, and their ideas on how space is emplaced through the body. In a sense this process becomes the making of the internal landscape of the mind; it forms through experience with the environment—which literally means *that which surrounds*.

Thus *Day's End* is an example of Matta-Clark's visual interpretation of constructed voids in the fabric of structures which reconfigure spatial relationships of absence and presence. These voids are intended to 'convert a place into a state of mind' (Attlee & Feuvre 2003, p. 40). One can acquire a sense of the spatial affects of the void forms through the verbal and written accounts of people who witnessed the making of the work or entered the space. Crimp (2010), for example, was positive in describing the work, and saw the re-invented space as 'an indoor park'; he also reports how others spoke of a sense of danger within the space. Matta-Clark's art dealer Holly Solomon mentioned the feeling of religiosity which she felt within the building, 'liken[ing] her experience to that of being in a cathedral' (Lee 2001, p. 130). She too commented on a sense of fear evoked by the cuts and their scale and proximity to the water, with Matta-Clark making 'a small hand rope for me and the other people who were fearful' so she was able to cross the floor (Lee 2001, p. 130) (Figure 7). Sculptor Joel Schapiro similarly spoke of the same sense of trepidation: 'the piece was dangerous to the viewer. It was large; it had scale. He [Matta-Clark] was creating some kind of abyss' (Lee 2001, p. 130).



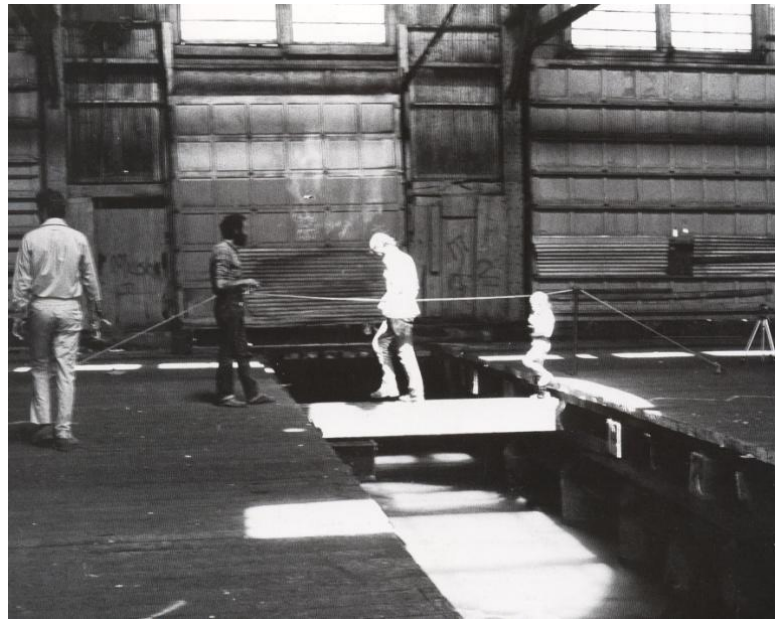


Figure 7. William Wegam, Richard Nonas and Gordon Matta-Clark crossing over water, inside *Day's End*, 1975

The New York City Sanitation Department became aware of Matta-Clark's illegal installation just as the artist had completed the work. He was then pursued by the police for questioning and possible arrest, and to escape this predicament retreated overseas on a short self-imposed exile (Diserens 2003, pp. 9, 15 and 18). The Sanitation Department perceived *Day's End* as vandalism with no aesthetic value and in 1979 the warehouse was refurbished, with the spatial voids replaced by a new façade (Lee 2001, p. 119). Nevertheless, though short-lived and devoid of official support, Matta-Clark's intervention signalled a new way of engaging with the 'ruinscape' of contemporary urban life. Despite the possible nostalgic reference in *Day's End* with the use of the sickle form, Matta-Clark was not referencing back to the Romantic ideals of the worker that could be associated with the site. Instead he was concerned with reclamation of the building and seeking to

bring the present into the structure, thus remaking without reverting to the past:

The one thing that I wanted was to make it possible for people to see it ... in a peaceful enclosure totally enclosed in an un-menacing kind of way. That when they went in there, they wouldn't feel like every squeak or every shadow was a potential threat. I know in lots of the earlier works that I did, the kind of paranoia of being in a space where you didn't know who was there, what was happening or whether there were menacing people lurking about, was just distracting. And I just wanted it to be a more joyous situation (Matta-Clark quoted in Crimp 2010).

Matta-Clark used his art practice to unbuild and to introduce spatial play and reconfigured forms within the decaying warehouse, seeking to reclaim such buildings for the public. The need to re-occupy and re-make the abandoned buildings of the waterfront of New York in the 1970s appeared to be a shared view:

It would seem within the rights of an artist ... to enter such a premises with a desire to improve the property, to transform the structure in the midst of its ugly criminal state into a place of interest, fascination and value (Weinberg 2012).

Matta-Clark's intervention at least appeared to posit the value of derelict places and encouraged a claim for public ownership of the waterfront that would be realised some forty years later. In this regard, it is worth noting

that from the mid-1980s onwards, the waterfront area where *Day's End* once existed remained relatively inaccessible due to the privatisation of the area and influx of expensive, high end residential and commercial developments (Lee 2001, p. 233; Papastergiadis 2006, p. 130; F MacLachlan 2012, pers. comm., 30 August). Presently, that trend is being reversed by the addition of public spaces and parks that stretch along the waterfront (Figure 8). These new developments are the result of current urban regeneration schemes that aim to reclaim places for public use, improving the liveability of the place, as well as featuring artworks throughout the spaces.



**Figure 8. The Hudson River Greenway and the new Pier 51 Playground, next to the site of Matta-Clark's *Day's End* piece, is today a public space**

Nevertheless, the rebuilt warehouse is still owned by the Sanitation Department and is inaccessible to the public (Figure 9). In February 2012, I viewed the site from the park nearby and have examined it numerous times on Google Earth, and it is apparent that the building is used for storage and car parking (Figures 10 and 11), although there are plans to extend the parkland and activity area to the Gansevoort Peninsular encompassing the warehouse (Friends of Hudson River Park & Hudson River Park Trust 2012).



Figure 9. Possible rebuilt warehouse (green building) is inaccessible to the public



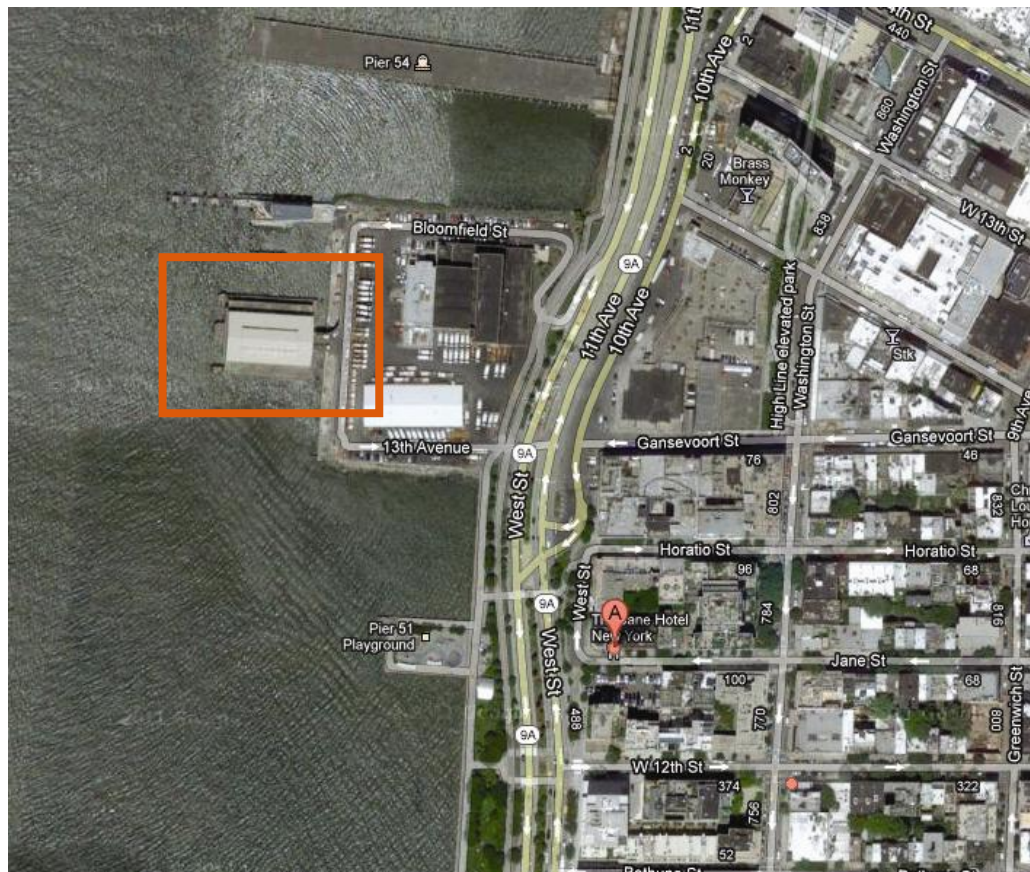


Figure 10. Google Earth view of the warehouse location for Matta-Clark's *Day's End* piece



Figure 11. Possible rebuilt warehouse (green building) of Matta-Clark's *Day's End* piece

What insights can be drawn from this case study? Evidently, the location and illegal status of *Day's End* enhanced the political clout of the work as a commentary on how the waterfront was out of bounds to the public.

Although Matta-Clark's installation did not directly change right-of-access to the place, it did provoke discussion among the members of New York's arts communities and others who accessed the site during its existence. The work also made the audience aware of internal and external spatial relationships, and prompted an appreciation of the climatic and cosmic atmosphere achieved by means of the 'building cuts'. This awareness was fostered because the audience was able to walk into warehouse and become immersed in and enveloped by the space, simultaneously being led to see a gap anew—as place in the urban environment.

Whiteread's sculpture, *House*, like Matta-Clark's *Day's End*, provoked debate about the rights of ownership in urban spaces. *House* achieved such ends, in part and in contrast with Matta-Clark, by creating distance between the audience and the embedded void. How this effect was achieved is the subject of chapter three.

## Chapter Three

### Whiteread: A 'Geographer of Hidden Spaces' <sup>11</sup>

Rachel Whiteread is an artist whose oeuvre relates to ideas of unbuilding and in-between spaces. Like Matta-Clark, her works (and especially her sculptural forms) encourage the viewer to observe the space between objects. However, Whiteread is more concerned with making works that reflect lived body experiences within these spaces. The intent of her practice is not deliberately political, unlike Matta-Clark's, whose *Day's End* work was aligned with the Situationist movement and with ideas that art could be used to reclaim urban spaces. Nevertheless, *House* (1993), which is the focus of this chapter, became political as members of the public interacted with the piece to express ideas about ownership and identity.

Whiteread's work is made by casting the spaces in and around objects to capture the intimate shapes and forms of the 'in-between' that exist in everyday places. It has been claimed that her work evokes a sense of a forgotten spirit (Walker Art Centre 1997; Marino 2004, p. 95; Walker Art Center 2009). This method of capturing personal traces and solidifying them into sculptures is achieved by a casting process that creates an inverse imprint of the object, forming an indexical relationship between the mould and the cast (Bradley 1997, p. 8; Hornstein 2004, p. 62; Donovan 2010).

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<sup>11</sup> (Donovan 2010)

Whiteread's process of solidifying these in-between spaces creates a copy of the form of the space. These sculptures are removed from the moulds and generally placed in a different context. *House*, on the other hand, is Whiteread's one work to date which remained at the place of the casted object, emphasising the relationship between the original building, the sculpture and the site.

*House* was made by creating a concrete cast of an existing Victorian terrace house at 193 Grove Road, in the borough of Bow, London. This terrace house was once part of a large tenement of similar buildings (Figure 12). Whiteread created an inverse concrete copy of the structure, unbuilding the original house in this process. The final work (Figure 13) stood on the same location as the original dwelling, a strategy noteworthy for Whiteread because it continued a connection between object and origin whose creation of a connection to place resonated strongly in the community.



Figure 12. The Victorian terrace houses on Grove Road, London, in 1983





Figure 13. Rachel Whiteread, *House*, 1993, concrete cast, 193 Grove Road, London

To demonstrate how this relationship between *House* and its site may have contributed to the work's translation to a political symbol, I explore Whiteread's use of unbuilding and in-between spaces. Like Matta-Clark, Whiteread's sculptural pieces involve physically undoing the objects she is casting and using the spatial void from this act as a catalyst for the work. However, unlike Matta-Clark, Whiteread typically casts her objects in her studio or other private premises, with the public unable to view the activity (though in the case of *House*, the casting process would have been open to public view); Whiteread's creative process is neither a performative act nor

aesthetically emphasised in the finished piece. Alternatively, Matta-Clark clearly saw his action of structural undoing as a deliberate display for an audience, which appeared to be fundamental to the intent of his ‘building cut’ works. This practice underpins Matta-Clark’s desire to record the making of these types of works using moving and still images, and his invitations to audiences to watch him and his helpers to ‘perform’ the ‘cuts’<sup>12</sup>. Like Matta-Clark, however, Whiteread’s work refers to an imminent act of destruction by intervention, rather than the gradual return to nature and notions of beauty revered in the Romantic notions of ruinscape.

Whiteread’s cast pieces fill the voids in and around objects, transforming them into solid forms, whereas Matta-Clark’s approach is subtractive — his ‘cuts’ take away from objects and creates voids. Yet, both seek to invest voids with meaning. Whiteread’s artistic interest involves in-between spaces in the built environment—but not as a means of providing places to encourage interaction and spatial plays within the forms, as Matta-Clark’s *Day’s End* piece did; rather her sculptures are a means to document *previous* ways of how people have interacted with built environments and objects.

Whiteread’s casts explore traces from the inhabitation of these spaces, scrutinising the imprints and folds of a mattress, examining faint suggestions

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<sup>12</sup> At this point one could also analyse ideas of the masculine and feminine because of the manner in which Matta-Clark often appeared topless as he made his ‘cuts’, seemingly emphasising the power of the male figure over his environment. While Whiteread’s internal and private process could be related to traditional notions of the women not undertaking such tasks, at least not in the public gaze. There is an irony, however, in Matta-Clark’s use of the cut, like the vagina, or Whiteread’s filling, a form of penetration. Such matters, while intriguing, are not further pursued here but would make an interesting study for others.

of where wallpaper once was, and probing indents and scratches of a cupboard. Whiteread's works suggest a depth to these spatial voids; yet the solidness of her pieces does not reveal the full sense of the in-between space. There is an aspect of the hidden, in contrast to Matta-Clark's work, where the introduction of voids within the built fabric of the warehouse encouraged the audience to look *through* the piece.

The district of London in which *House* was situated was an area of low socioeconomic status, where people lived in cramped housing conditions and experienced high levels of crime and violence (Sinclair 1995, p. 18). In the 1870s the road had separate uses: at one end, newly built tenement housing and at the other end, areas of trade. The adjoining area housed a mixture of professional people living alongside those struggling to make ends meet (Shone 1995, p. 57). The atmosphere of the place was said to have noticeably deteriorated between World Wars One and Two (Shone 1995, p. 58). In World War Two, Grove Road was the first place in London to have a flying bomb fall on the area, damaging the already-dilapidated built fabric (Lingwood 1995, p. 11). After the war, the need to improve living conditions in the area resulted in rows of deteriorating and damaged tenement houses being demolished (Lingwood 2009, p. 158).

Whiteread used the last of this style of house to make her piece. Her work was funded by the British organisation, Artangel. The group has initiated and supported various art projects over a twenty year period. Artangel is

described as a registered charity relying ‘on the support of our private patrons’ (Artangel 2012). The organisation is also supported by lottery funds from the Art Council of England, which is public money from the national government (Arts Council England 2012). In this regard, the organisation must have considered the aesthetic and legal merits of Whiteread’s work, considering their reputation and need to secure patronage in the future. Whiteread and Artangel’s James Lingwood spent six months looking for the appropriate house for her piece (Thomas 1995, p. 129). This search included looking at a tenement house in Hoxton square, London, one similar to that at Grove Road (Pesenti 2010, p. 19). Whiteread claims that she chose the Grove Road building because of its archetypical characteristics (*The Eye: Rachel Whiteread* 2005). Lingwood (1995) recalls that ‘after months of private persuasion and occasional public meetings, the councillors of Bow Neighbourhood voted by a small majority to give a temporary lease on 193 Grove Road’. Whiteread’s two-storey house was built in a manner that typified the narrow and cramped width of the tenement form: small rooms and a small backyard area mostly taken up with out-buildings. It was one of many such repetitive structures that formed a line along the road and that was marked for demolition. Whiteread knew of its fate but had intended that her piece would stay longer than the eighty days it survived (Pesenti 2010, p. 30).

She began by exploring the possibilities of spatial removal using office correction fluid on photographs to elide the structure from drawings,

(Pesenti 2010) (Figure 14) a strategy that alludes to layers of history and shifting ideas of the house and of dwelling (Tate Gallery 2010). *House Study* (1992) recalls Matta-Clark's aesthetics, ideas and building cuts in creating voids by excision and using two-dimensional works to explore ideas of three-dimensional absence from (ironically by means of filling in) the built environment.



Figure 14. Rachel Whiteread, *House Study* (parts 1-4), 1992, correction fluid, pencil, watercolour on colour photo, 29.5 x 42 cm

Whiteread's sculptural works fill the void created by the removal of the building. Constructing the internal solidified spaces of *House* captures a moment of time and 'mummifies the sense of silence in the room' (Gross 2004, p. 38; *The Eye: Rachel Whiteread* 2005). By constructing a layer of steel framework for reinforcement, then spraying that surface with concrete, and

finally peeling off the shell of the existing house, Whiteread revealed the form of the internal space of the building underneath (Figure 15). This manner of solidifying the space created a semi-recognisable form. Only the surface of the sculpture is visible to the viewer; it is an edge of transition between the presence of the original form and the internal void (Hornstein 2004, p. 64). The concrete form that is the construction of the internal void exists beyond the surface of the object and is not visible to the viewer. Geographer Paul Harrison (2012) comments on this point, claiming that:

*House* has not and does not free our gaze to look inside. The previously absent has not been disclosed and made available to us. If anything, *House* makes a show of not showing; it is a very public exercise of non-disclosure.



Figure 15. The making of *House*, autumn 1993

Whiteread emphasised this point by inviting viewers to become the ‘wall’ of the structure as they stand in positions that map onto where the external

fabric of the building once stood. This strategy encouraged members of the audience to focus inwards and consider the value of spaces between objects, as well as contemplate various actions and activities that once took place within the area of this now solid form (Gross 2004, p. 50; *The Eye: Rachel Whiteread* 2005). She wanted to encourage observation of these types of spaces, but did not reveal all to the audience. There appeared to be a sense of the private within this manner of aestheticisation. Whiteread's work blocked entry into the voids—the audience confronts the 'void' as an impenetrable form, unlike *Day's End*, in which Matta-Clark invited the viewers into the intervention, allowing members of the audience to construct their own interpretations by engaging with the piece through its reconfigured forms.

Whiteread's intention with *House*, to make a work not alluding to any particular personal or political associations, was frequently misinterpreted. As Harrison (2012) argues, the artist's aim was to explore larger, apolitical themes relating to lived spaces that were not specific to just one place, rather than attempting to preserve particular memories within specific sites. Similarly, geographer Doreen Massey (1995, p. 42) claims that this is why the piece is called '*House*' and not '*Home*'. Despite Whiteread's aim, the work was interpreted as a form of monument that commented on a nostalgic sense of place and the personal history associated with the building (Harrison 2012). Researcher of monuments, memory and art, James E. Young continued this

sentiment describing the work as a form of counter, or anti, monument<sup>13</sup> (Harrison 2012). *House* was also seen as a memorial for a lost community, a form of a death mask and a memory work (Massey, 1995, p. 37; Meecham & Sheldon, 2000, p. 48; Saltzman, 2006, p. 18; Shone, 1995, p. 52). Others saw it as a comment on urban gentrification. Writer and curator, Bartomeu Marí (1997, p. 66) presents such a reading of this piece:

Bound up with the evolution of such a city, and with life within it: the accidents of history, of real estate speculation, of gentrification. It [*House*] raised more polemic issues in contemporary society: the right to have a home, control of property and the demise of areas of free access in the urban context .

This understanding of *House* could be associated with the idea of attaching a memorialised interpretation to an object, attempting to preserve the memories of a place which is threatened or lost (Hayden 1997, p. 112).

Public reactions to the work transformed the piece from its intended *self-effacing* form to a political statement and performative work. People left bottles of milk outside the sculpture; advertised the work as a viable piece of real estate and added graffiti and paint to its surface (Bird 1995, p. 112) (Figures 16 and 17). The salience of these familiar additions to an uncannily familiar but yet misplaced sculpture were intensified by the manner in which

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<sup>13</sup> The counter, or anti, monument has arisen as a reaction to traditional styles of monuments, supported by official governing organisations which are said to be an emotionally ineffective form of marking memories. Counter monuments allow a greater level of freedom in how the monument interprets the event and for whom (Bennett 2005, p. 98).



in the sculpture's fabric Whiteread herself captured various lived traces. These included segments of wallpaper embedded in the concrete form, or inverted details such as light switches, door locks and fireplaces (Donovan 2010) (Figure 18). The way in which *House* was said to have 'overwhelmed the viewer with intimate domestic details' may have added to the reasons why the public physically responded to the work (Lingwood 2009, p. 158). The hand-sprayed text on the concrete surface was a conversation expressing community sentiments about what the site and work represented. The first text to be written was 'Homes for All, Black and White'; followed by a response 'Wot for?', and later 'Why not?' (Lingwood 2009, p. 158). These publicly aestheticised gestures expressed people of the community's experiences and memories of the place, in a manner which formed an added political layer to the work. Their reactions recall parallels with Matta-Clark's *Day's End* and with various and sometimes contrasting ideas expounded by the Situationist International group, Lefebvre or Tuan that involved valuing in-between city spaces and reclaiming such areas through artistic intervention. The remarkable point about *House*, of course, is that the work unintentionally became a symbol of class struggle and rights to the city.



Figures 16 and 17. Visual reactions from public on the surface and surrounds of *House*



Figure 18. Rachel Whiteread, *House*, detail of door locks, 1993, concrete cast

The piece also evoked strong feeling in Councillor Flounders who described the work as an ‘excrescence’ explaining that ‘the site was an irritation to be cleansed as soon as possible (Townsend 2004, p. 19) (Figure 19). Flounders and his fellow councillors had previously presented a vision of removing all housing in this area to make way for ‘progressive development’ in the form of a common<sup>14</sup>. The introduced Wennington Green reflected the councillors’ desire for a flat and gated landscape, with the intent of being environmentally beneficial for the community (Sinclair 1995, p. 17). Clearly *House* stood in the way of this spatial transformation, and was not considered by the council as having any aesthetical or cultural merit; so the committee ordered its demolition (Figure 20) on the same day Whiteread was awarded the prestigious Turner Prize<sup>15</sup> for the work (Lingwood 1995, p. 7; Illuminations 2003, p. 53; Tate Gallery 2010). Razing *House* reintroduced the process of unbuilding to the site—here is an ironic passage from Whiteread’s initial method of making the cast; to the removal by her of the existing building; to her cast itself being unbuilt by those who sought to move beyond a working class past. This fate is strikingly similar to Matta-Clark’s *Day’s End*. Both *House* and *Day’s End* now only exist in still and moving images.

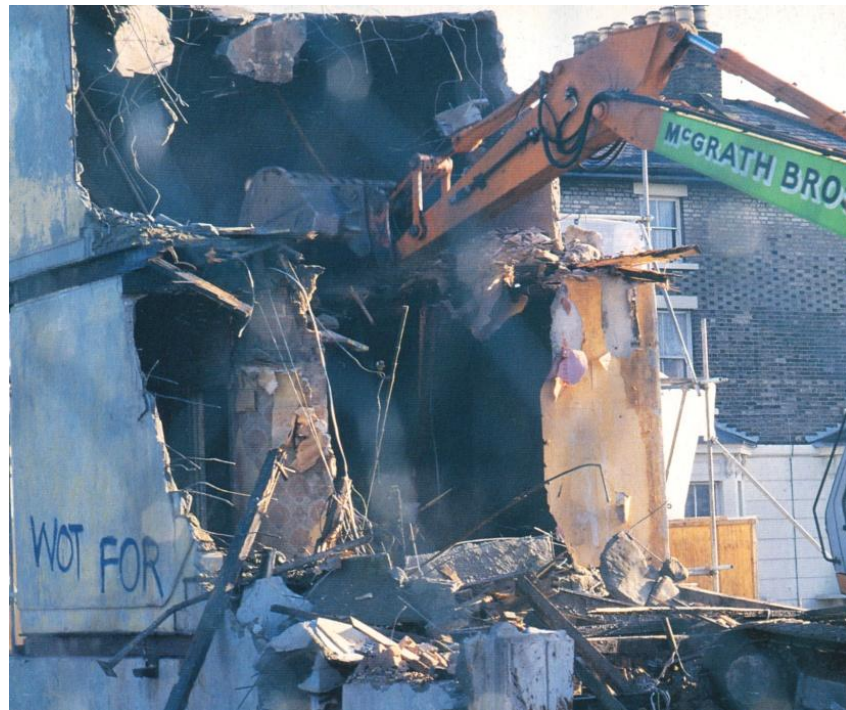
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<sup>14</sup> A ‘common’ is described as a grassy field in an urban context that often occurs as a result of changing uses of a space and subsequent abandonment of property and ruination (Papastergiadis 2006, p. 185). The park areas were once developed from the left-over spaces that were a result of bombing campaigns on England in World War Two (Papastergiadis 2006, p. 185).

<sup>15</sup> The Turner Prize is an annual art award presented to a British artist under the age of fifty.



**Figure 19.** *House* in context of the common, described by Councillor Flounders as ‘an irritation to be cleansed’



**Figure 20.** The demolition of *House*

The removal of *House* ‘cleansed’ the common of the work, leaving a flat open space that still exists (Figure 21). The green area is fenced and uninviting. The empty site where *House* stood (Figures 22) echoes ideas of absent histories and place-based politics that the work came to represent. Both *House* and *Day’s End* were unbuilt as a result of conflicting opinions about the values associated with ownership and access. While Matta-Clark set out to use his art to challenge these notions, doing so by means of an illegal intervention, Whiteread did not attempt to do this, and secured official art funding and was awarded a prize for her work. Even then, the piece was interpreted as a political and controversial gesture.



Figure 21. 193 Grove Road, London, the site of Whiteread’s previous *House* work in 1993,





Figure 22. 193 Grove Road, London, the site of Whiteread's previous *House* work in April, 2012. The piece was in the approximate location of the two benches

In the final analysis, public artworks will always incite varying reactions from the community. This capacity to provoke seems particularly pronounced in relation to funded work made to represent public views or issues. An example of this is New York's National September 11 Memorial design by Michael Arad. In chapter four I examine how this design invests meaning into a site of terror and abjection, and deals with a complex brief and diverse stakeholders. I analyse how the political is portrayed in the act of unbuilding the Towers and in the architectural response designed around the space left by the removal of the buildings. I also consider the aesthetic character of the spatial voids and ask how these create a sense of place different from Arad's intention for the site.

## Chapter Four

### **Arad: A Designer of Metaphoric Absence**

Unbuilding and in-between spaces are profoundly exemplified in the National September 11 Memorial by Michael Arad, based in Lower Manhattan at the World Trade Center site. In this chapter I analyse how the characteristics of this design have been engineered by varying government groups and other organisations as they attempt to reflect public sentiments about the 9/11 attack and the site. This process of complex public engagement is in contrast to *Day's End*, an illegal invention with intent of making a political statement, and *House*, an officially funded and supported work that was co-opted for political ends other than those perhaps intended by the artist.

Arad's design for the National September 11 Memorial follows a contemporary trend to create memorials to evoke sensations and emotions through the aesthetics of the design (Watts 2009, p. 417). To fully appreciate how Arad's design responds to the political and traumatic significance of the site is also to appreciate the importance of the original World Trade Center. Commissioned in 1962 by the Port Authority of New York, the Center was always intended to be a landscape of power (Paperny 2012, p. 46). The 'Twin Towers' were described as 'the tallest letters in the world [which] compose a

gigantic rhetorical excess in both expenditure and production' (De Certeau 2002, p. 91). This interpretation echoed ideas enunciated by architects Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier, for whom the skyscraper embodied futuristic ideals and confidence (Bevan 2007, p. 66). This symbolism was emphasised by the double effect provided by two such skyscrapers (Kearney 2003, p. 33). The design had a modernist aesthetic, and used technologically advanced building materials and methods to create vast open internal spaces, and was both massive in bulk and tall in stature.

In *The Destruction of Memory: Architecture at War* (2007), architectural writer and critic Robert Bevan explained how sites in the built environment can be used as targets in conflict, often for symbolic reasons, to attack identity, cultural heritage and religion. He underlines the point that this tendency is exemplified by the terrorist act which resulted in the demolition of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001; the Center was targeted as the symbol of capitalist power. Its demise would draw a massive international audience of particular messages (Bevan 2007, p. 63 and 65).

Jean Baudrillard (2003, p. 8) agreed with Bevan, claiming that the falling Towers had the 'greatest symbolic impact', and has suggested that the plan to raze them to the ground was carefully considered and designed. The tumbling structures did indeed gain massive global media coverage. A multitude of moving and still images were rapidly and easily accessible and continuously replayed, increasing the spectacular—indeed sublime—



characteristics of the event<sup>16</sup> (Kearney 2003, p. 38; Smith 2006, p. 148). Yet, as they unfolded, the events of 9/11 seemed almost unreal, surreal. Slavoj Žižek (2002, p. 12) compared those events as akin to the ‘falsity’ associated with ‘reality TV shows’ in which what is real is distanced. In the case of the Towers, there was a sense of dissociation from reality such was the visual effect and scale of the event as captured on screens and in printed matter<sup>17</sup> (Ray 2005, p. 1; Fitzpatrick 2007, p. 86).

Two weeks after the fall of the Towers, Philippe de Montebello (2001), the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s Director, claimed publicly that the Trade Center ruin was ‘a testament to renewal. As a symbol of survival, it is already, in its own way, a masterpiece—and so it should remain’. In *The New York Times*, critic Herbert Muschamp (2001) said ‘the bending, folding, curving shapes of the World Trade Center wreckage echo the neo-Baroque contortions of blob architecture as practiced by [architects] Greg Lynn, Ben van Berkel and others,’ and ‘the Walls [of the ruined Towers] remind me of [fashion designer, Issey] Miyake’s pleated clothes’. The composer Karlheinz

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<sup>16</sup> Of course this feeling is a subjective one influenced by my own perspectives and others around me, and by the fact that I was not in America at the time of the 9/11 attacks. This did allow me the experience of witnessing the collapse by watching moving images that enhanced the surrealism of the act. Given that a sublime feeling is a subjective experience, I can only imagine that sublime feelings may not register for people at the site, or who were affected by the event.

<sup>17</sup> This manner of witnessing the tragedy also recalls ideas of the Situationist International, whom described people’s relationship to the imagery in the mass media as part of their ‘spectacle’ ideology (Jappe 1999, p. 5; Marcus 2004, p. 9). This particularly related to the emergence of war footage broadcast on television (Jappe 1999, p. 1). Debord described this as ‘the self-portrait of power in the age of power’s totalitarian rule of the condition of existence’ (Jappe 1999, p. 9). Ideas associated with this aspect of the ‘spectacle’ have also been said to help one understand the purpose and reasons for conflicts within societies (Jappe 1999, p. 134).

Stockhausen admired the aesthetic qualities of the act of the collapse, describing the falling Towers as: ‘the biggest work of art anywhere, for the whole cosmos’, one that must ‘from now on completely change your manner of seeing things’ (Battersby 2007, p. 21).

This sentiment has been echoed by artist Damien Hirst, who claimed that ‘the thing about 9/11 is that it’s kind of an artwork in its own right ... it was devised visually’ (Simon, Stryker & Slome 2009, p. 10; Radical Art 2011). Writer Jonathan Frazen described the terrorists as ‘death artists’ (Smith 2006, p. 146). However, cultural critic Brian Dillon (Boym et al. 2006) refers to the ruinscape of the Trade Center as a ‘vexed issue’ not able to be aestheticised. Yet, the ruination that followed the Towers’ collapse, unexpected and overwhelming as it was, has prompted many creative readings of the ruined landscape and its traumatic unbuilding. Consider Mark Bain’s sound work, *StartEndTime (WTC 9/11 seismic data sonification)*, 2003; or Joel Meyerowitz’s ongoing photographic collection, *World Trade Center Archive* and his photo book *Aftermath* (Figure 23); or the 2002 film of eleven directorial responses to the event, *11'09"01 - September 11 (Eleven Minutes, Nine Seconds, One Image: September 11)*.



Figure 23. An image from Joel Meyerowitz's photo book *Aftermath*, which is part of his ongoing photographic collection, *World Trade Center Archive*

During a visit to New York, six months after the destruction of the World Trade Center, I was told stories about the owners and managers of buildings abutting the site charging fees to members of the public for access to their higher floors, or creating temporary 'viewing platforms' for the public to gaze upon the rubble of the towers<sup>18</sup>. Public fascination with the ruins likely had

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<sup>18</sup> I should mentioned that I did not go to any type of viewing platform, which incurred a fee or otherwise and did not go to New York with the purpose to visit the site. I felt uncomfortable about being a 'voyeur' in the area, yet also curious about what the ruins looked like; perhaps this was because of my academic interest. I did spend some time walking around the place, which looked like a typical building site at that stage. I was more interested in the church opposite, in which the blast-damaged gravestones were covered in plastic and still revealed traces of the physical effects of the event.

little to do with the aesthetics perceived by artists and noted above. The visits were perhaps more to do with what Baudrillard (2003, p. 30) refers to as a 'theatre' of 'immoral fascination'—prurient curiosity and voyeurism—or with attempts to come to terms with an event that did not immediately produce scenes of violent deaths typically associated with sites of conflict. Indeed, it was only later that the public gained access to footage of people falling and images of amputated limbs covered with dust. Cultural theorist Terry Smith (2006, p. 138) refers to such absence in the media of the coverage of violence and deaths as 'more investment in the remains of the mangled buildings'. The manner of viewing the collapse of the Towers through electronic frames and printed material seems to have added to the voyeuristic nature of the site.

The shocking nature of the 9/11 attack resulted in the site and other areas around New York becoming places for the creation of 'spontaneous monuments'. Such memorials traditionally have been associated with ritualised acts of grief in which people mark sites of trauma with ephemeral objects such as flowers and candles; they are often highly personalised, anonymous and site-specific (Meecham & Sheldon 2000, p. 78). Such responses suggest a need to reclaim and identify with place; they also recall suggestions from the Situationist International that our reactions to events are often unplanned and aesthetic.

The official response to 9/11 has been to rebuild another World Trade Center, featuring five iconic skyscrapers bearing names such as 'Freedom Tower'<sup>19</sup>. Amongst the spaces is the National September 11 Memorial and landscaped park. The brief for the work was heavily influenced by public opinion and input, and the design was overseen by numerous government agencies and other organisations.

Arad's design for the Memorial is based around the voids left in the urban fabric after the destruction of the Towers; it is a powerful space symbolising absence, the loss of lives, trust and power, and ruptures in identity, environment and place. Arad (2012) claims that he began his design of metaphoric absence as a personal reaction to the event, before Libeskind presented his masterplan design and prior to the announcement that there would be a design competition. His initial concept was to construct the two voids such that they would sit within the Hudson River, with the surface 'torn open' to allow water from the river to pour down into the forms (Arad 2012). He developed the original design by moving the momentous tear in the river to the site of the fallen Trade Towers, always aiming to convey the sense of water endlessly falling within the design. His intent for the area was to create a 'room in the city' that provided a site for 'deep memory' and that might arouse again and again the compassion he had witnessed on the streets of New York after 9/11 (Arad 2012).

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<sup>19</sup> This has recently been changed to One World Trade Center, or 1 WTC.

Arad's final winning entry for the Memorial and park design, completed with landscape architect Peter Walker, was entitled 'Reflecting Absence', responding to the idea that architecture and art can powerfully represent loss<sup>20</sup>. The design extended the masterplan architect Libeskind's ideas about the void. Libeskind<sup>21</sup> also employed the motif of spatial absence by indicating a void of twenty metre's depth on the plan. The space was to accommodate the raw remains of a slurry wall that had supported the foundations of the original Towers from the force of the river, thus translating an artefact from the old into a memorial in the new (Kamin 2010, p. 36; Arad 2012). Libeskind saw the void and wall as symbolising 'resilience and democracy' (Kamin 2010, p. 36), reflecting the political impetus to rebuild the site (Vilder 2010, p. 30 and 33).

As built, the National September 11 Memorial consists of two void forms with cascading walls of water, and is based on the outline of the footprints of the Trade Towers (Figures 24 and 25). Two smaller pools are positioned in the centres of each of the voids, allowing water to fall to a deeper level whose bottom is not visible (Figure 26). The surrounding landscape, designed by Walker, introduces a complementary gridded pattern of trees throughout the park (Arad 2012). Stone paving and shaped concrete seats are placed amongst the trees in a minimalist aesthetic, for which Walker is known; and

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<sup>20</sup> An extension of this idea of absence and memory being a 'phantom shape in the ground' is used by Young (1992, p. 290) to describe artist Horst Hoheisel's inverted memorial fountain, which also uses the void as a symbol for loss. This sentiment can equally apply to the void pools of Arad's design.

<sup>21</sup> Libeskind often employs spatial voids to represent loss in his designs; this includes his well-known design of the Jewish Museum (1999) in Berlin.

the whole references the clean forms of the void pools (Figure 27)<sup>22</sup>.



Figure 24. The north pool of the National September 11 Memorial, designed by Arad



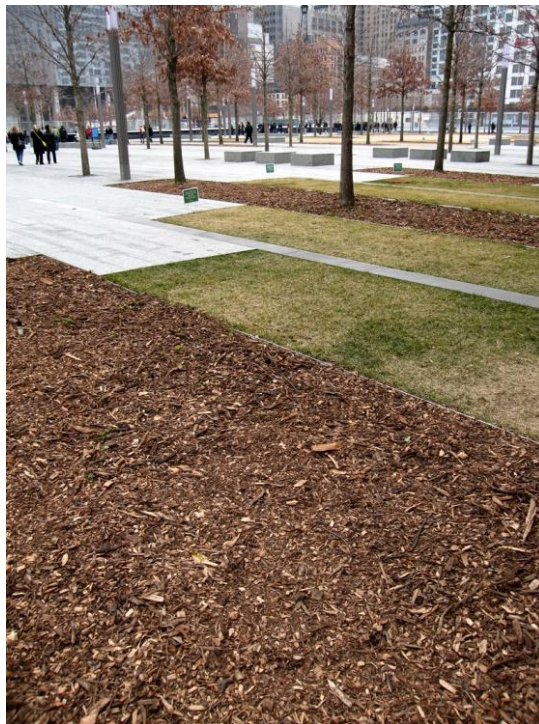
Figure 25. The south pool of the National September 11 Memorial, designed by Arad

<sup>22</sup> In addition, in a presentation at the Association of American Geographers Conference in New York in 2012, Arad used the word 'play' numerous times, having aspired to create a park that has 'healed' from the trauma of 9/11 and in which people relax and gather together.





**Figure 26. Internal pool that does not reveal the bottom of the form**



**Figure 27. Stone paving and shaped concrete seats of the landscape design by Walker**



Arad worked within Libeskind's brief to create a place connected to the surrounding urban grid, but repositioned the Memorial from an area he felt was initially shielded from the public. In principle, 'Reflecting Absence' opens up the site, inviting members of the public to flow from surrounding places into the park and to the Memorial. In practice, when I visited the site as part of this study in February 2012, it was a high security area with one access point in and out; that point remains heavily guarded and has screening facilities and pat-downs. There is no reference to security structures or measures in the architect's proposal drawings of the site; these may not exist in the future as the surrounding construction work is completed and the park area becomes more established.

'Reflecting Absence' was originally designed so there was public access underneath the walls of water of the pools. It was proposed that in this nether region would be inscribed the names of the people who died as a result of the attacks on 9/11 and in an earlier attack on the Towers in 1993. This idea was criticised on the basis that the symbolism of water falling on names was too powerfully associated with falling or drowning and demise (Arad 2012). The position of the names<sup>23</sup> was moved to the sculpted parapet around each of the pools, and the idea of access underneath them was abandoned. The square outline representing the footprints of the Towers

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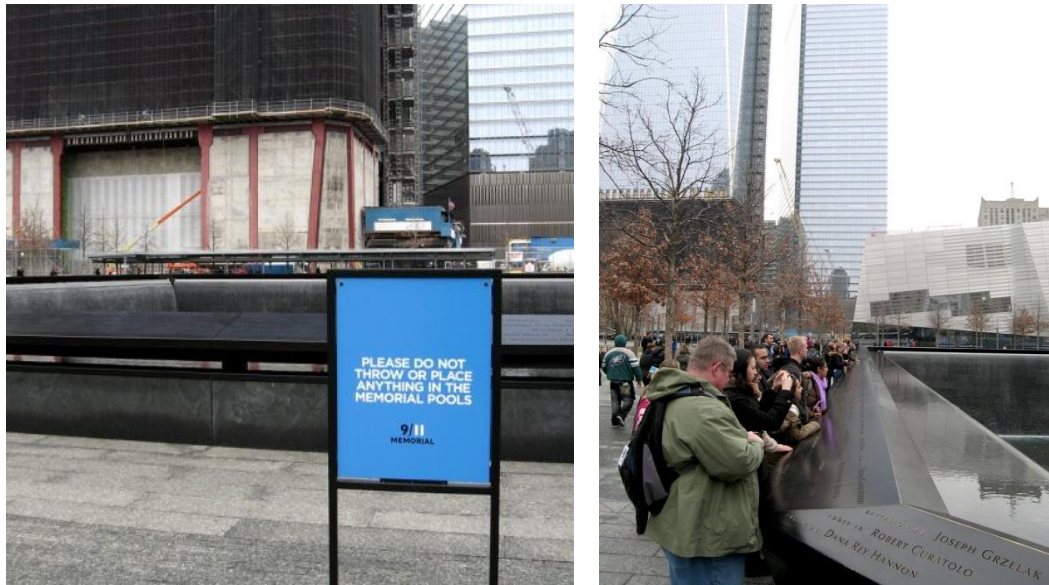
<sup>23</sup> Arad claims that the hardest design element involved considering the position and order of the names of the deceased around the pools—there being 2,983 of them. He developed a system in which families and friends of the deceased could nominate the placement of names rather than falling back on a more utilitarian system, for example listing names according to place of employment and job title (Arad 2012).

was modified by shearing off each corner of the walled edge, allowing visibility to the smaller voids for people of all heights (Arad 2012) (Figure 28).



Figure 28. The square 'footprint' outline is sheared off at each corner, allowing visibility to the smaller voids

The voids in Arad's design are constructed forms designed to represent traces of the in-between spaces from the unbuilding of the Towers; this is reminiscent of Whiteread's casting method and the ways in which *House* hinted at past lives now absent. The Memorial's void pools are to be looked into, but further participation (such as by going into or below those voids) is constrained—which parallels the subtracted spaces of *Day's End* (Figures 29 and 30).



Figures 29 and 30. Visitors to the Memorial site are not able to enter into the voids, restraining how one is connected to the site

Beyond these details and immediacies of the site, the events of 9/11 transformed the World Trade Center into a landscape newly inscribed with terror and global geopolitics and fallen global economic prowess; whereas Matta-Clark's and Whiteread's interventions heightened the politically contentious nature within the *Day's End* and *House* sites. However, all three examples of unbuilding and in-between spaces highlight the significance and reach of politicised environments by a kind of transactional arrangement; formed by members of the audience, through their embodied experiences of the works and their adjacent places, though not necessarily in a manner intended by the artists and architect. Matta-Clark meant his piece to provoke discussion and to reclaim space, but he did not anticipate the sublime feelings the piece incited in some of his viewers. Whiteread's *House* became a

platform for public expressions regarding ideas about ownership and identity even though this was not a conscious goal on her part.

Public interpretations of Arad's Memorial Pools appear to be different from the original aims of the architect, a matter of divergence that I was able to glean from field work at the site. I visited the site five months after the opening of the Memorial. It was at the end of winter, and on a cold, overcast and rainy day. The site was all leafless winter trees and grey tones reflecting from surrounding buildings, sky and paving into the Memorial Pools. For me, the Memorial design evoked a dark and heavy overwhelming sense of despair and resentment, and promoted neither quiet reflection nor a desire to use the area for social support, play or community. The gloomy atmosphere of the day was repeated in the pools and their smaller internal voids, reflecting Arad's intentions to emulate an 'emptiness and a fragile quality', and for the water to 'remain for ever ongoing' in a continuous downwards trajectory into deep, dark holes (Arad 2012). The large open void pools embedded in the ground and their curtains of falling water recall the trauma of a terrorist attack, constituting what De Certeau describes as 'haunted geographies' (Crang & Thrift 2000, p. 150). This sentiment reflects the idea of the site as a graveyard (Young 2002, p. 180; Davidge 2011), in which Arad's use of spatial absences seems to refuse the possibility of forgetting or of healing. In such instances, absences within built environments associated with sites of trauma are 'modernity's ghosts of the

nation' (Till 2005, p. 9) and 'wounds' that can never be healed (Roth, Lyons & Merewether 1997, p. 36; Huyssen 2003, p. 69).

During my visit to the Memorial I spent time observing how other people interacted with the site and work. It appeared that the few who did seem deeply moved by the Memorial often stood back from the parapet, quietly pausing in a moment of contemplation, perhaps overwhelmed by the effects of the endless water falling or, indeed, its affect. It also appeared that there were more tourists than local people (this is reiterating by others, such as Davidge 2011; Raab 2011; Schama 2011). These visitors, and no doubt many others, appear to be wanting to make sense of the site and Memorial through playing 'witness [to] memories that belong to other people' (Aulich 2007, p. 207).

Perhaps the apparent disconnection between the trauma of the site and Arad's design, experienced by myself and others I spoke to whom visited the site (F Wilson 2012, pers. comm., 16 February; L Brinklow 2012, pers. comm., 26 February; E Stratford 2012, pers. comm., 17 April) was further obscured by the overwhelming security procedure and presence in the site; alongside the signage indicating where and where not to go (Figures 29 and 32) and the surrounding building activity and the many planes and helicopters flying overhead.

The contradictory relationship of the architect's intent for the design and outcomes that I experienced during my visit, appeared to be mirrored in critical commentaries from journalists, architecture and art critics and the general public, raised since the opening of the Memorial. These sentiments are generally less than favourable about the effectiveness the void pools. Criticism of the design refers to burdening feelings accentuated by the downward endlessness of the water; disconnectedness between the collapsing chaos of the 9/11 and the controlled aesthetic of the design; the literal nature of the concept; the meaningless emptiness of notions of reflection; and the inability to properly view the whole site and make sense of the voids (Saltzman 2006, p. 22; Denson 2011; Filler 2011; Gibson 2011; Lamster 2011; Stephens 2011; F Wilson 2012, pers. comm., 16 February; L Brinklow 2012, pers. comm., 26 February; E Stratford 2012, pers. comm., 17 April; A Geard 2012, pers. comm., 23 October).

The water cascading down the internal walls of the void spaces creates a hypnotic effect. Arad (2012) claims that there is only a very small amount of water falling from each of the holes in the edge of the serrated parapet—an engineering solution to soften the impact of splash when water hits the pools. This technique is meant to achieve a sense of peace and, as a design element, is based on likening the flow of water to the flow of social engagements and interactions (Arad 2012). Individual drops of water falling from the edges of the walls collectively gather together as the water travels towards the bottom, thus referring to Arad's design intent. The poetic notion of positive

togetherness does seem overshadowed by the trajectory of the falling water, as well as by the dramatic impact water has *en masse* as it crashes into the enormous pools below. Similar sentiments also reflect on the size and power of the waterfall and void spaces; this overpowering atmosphere has been described as distracting (Gibson 2011; Lamster 2011). The water's sound is also quite noticeable, masking surrounding sounds and emphasising the power of cascading water. Arad (2012) had hope that the sound would 'isolate you from the city' but in a manner so that you 'can still have a conversation'. Others, who questioned the architect about this aspect at his presentation at the Association of American Geographers' Annual Meeting in February 2012, felt similarly to me in regards to the sound level of the water being quite prominent, and perhaps distracting. This atmosphere was also enhanced at times by the spray of the water as the wind increased.

The immensity of the Memorial has been negatively compared to the more human scale of Maya Lin's design for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (Filler 2011) (Figure 31). Yet, at the former site, the placement of the trees and benches, colour tones of ground covers and varying use of lighting is meant to counteract the size difference between people and site (PWP Landscape Architecture 2011). Walker claims that the park area will allow one to 'take comfort from the soothing, life-affirming forest', which 'expresses the shared patterns of nature and humanity' (PWP Landscape Architecture 2011). This claim has nevertheless been challenged. Art critic and historian Simon Schama (2011, p. 1) has reflected on his experience of the Memorial,

describing the landscape as a ‘relentless military rows’ of trees in which the ‘tomb-like granite slabs ... make that space more dutifully mournful than you would wish’ (Figure 32). Any praise for the landscaping tends to be based on the computer-aided drawings (CAD) of the design before it was constructed (Watts 2009, p. 416; Lamster 2011).



**Figure 31. The size of the National September 11 Memorial has been criticised for not considering the human scale**



**Figure 32. The ‘relentless military rows’ of trees and ‘tomb-like granite slabs’ (Schama 2011)**



Another aspect to Arad's design that has been questioned is that the void forms based on the Towers footprint are smaller in size and, while constructed 'within' the original footprints, are not *at* same place. This choice has been seen as compromising the site's authentic connection to 9/11 (Davidge 2011). Thus, not everyone appreciates (meaning both apprehends *and* values) Arad's Memorial design as a *representation* of the collapsed Towers; the spatial voids are constructed copies, rather than the original destroyed forms or footprints (Saltzman 2006, p. 22).

How the voids create a larger form of experiential space will play out over the coming years with the completion of all buildings in Libeskind's masterplan. Arad's architectural intentions for the Memorial design appear to be different from mine and others who have experienced the Pools. The general criticism tends to be based on a sense of disconnection between, on the one hand, personal and meaningful experience, and, on the other hand, controlled interpretations and political agendas. The aesthetics of the design seems to evoke the politics of the site and to be a statement of power and resilience. Arad may have had the challenge of producing his design to this level of officialdom, but it guarantees a level of protection and longevity to the work—two aspects that *Day's End* and *House* did not have. The officially commissioned nature of the work has a different political impact than Whiteread's and Matta-Clark's pieces. Although the design was intended as an expression of public sentiment, the Memorial Pools could be seen more as

a state-legitimised reclamation of the void rather than a grass-roots reclamation of public space as in *Day's End* and *House*.

## Conclusion

Through analysis of Matta-Clark's *Day's End*, Whiteread's *House* and Arad's design for the National September 11 Memorial, this research illustrates how artistic interventions into politically contentious in-between spaces catalyses public debate about the events embedded in these sites. Exploring the politicisation of place by the unbuilding of space and the emphasis on the power of the 'in-between' in each of the works, has identified significant differences and commonalities among the three works. These findings have wider reach for scholarly understandings of place, identity and the aesthetic in art theory and cultural geography.

I began this research with a critique of the Romanticisation of the ruin and commentary about the ways in which contemporary artists have responded to 'modern day' instances of ruination. The structural undoing associated with *Day's End*, *House* and the National September 11 Memorial did not gradually return the built environment to the earth through slow processes. Nor did the unbuilding of two of the works and sites follow Romantic aesthetic views of ruins. In *Day's End*, Matta-Clark unbuilt a warehouse structure using hand-formed 'cuts', adding an aesthetic purpose to its naturally occurring ruination. The remains of the building became a vessel for Matta-Clark's ideals of the 'rights of the city' and ownership of places that

were topical in New York at a time characterised by deindustrialisation, the oil crisis, and the decline of the left. The aspects of unbuilding connected to Whiteread's *House* piece equally came to represent the politics of the area in which she worked; a declining working class area at the cusp of gentrification under the influence of mobile capital and changing economic priorities. The Grove Road house was structurally undone as part of Whiteread's casting process. In the case of both *Day's End* and *House*, the cycle of unbuilding continued with the forced removal of each of these works. The National September 11 Memorial design by Arad was in response to the devastating act of unbuilding, which is representative of collapse and ruination as a result of conflict. But in contrast to Matta-Clark's and Whiteread's works, it is an official commission designed to last permanently. Thus its political impact reflects both the authority and sanction of the state and demands from the American public that the events of 9/11 be not forgotten. Its forced removal is likely only under another terrorist attack, and it is firmly embedded in a landscape of extraordinary privilege—ironically, one that is intimately linked to the decisions of global financial capital that indirectly might connect to the demise of a warehouse on the waterfront and the trend to disinvest from social housing in a British suburb.

The subversive nature of *Day's End* and use of in-between spaces within the urban environment represented Matta-Clark's interest in the ideologies of the Situationist International. Matta-Clark's intervention was commenting on reclaiming in-between spaces through the introduction of creative works.

His aim was to make a work that aesthetically enhanced a disused space, and the unsupported and unofficial nature of his piece allowed him full aesthetic and ideological control to achieve this. *Day's End* was an example. The piece commented on the aesthetic and social values of the decaying warehouse, through the spatial voids and reconfigured forms.

Similarly, Whiteread's commissioned piece *House* became a symbol for discussion of ideas of ownership and identity, despite her intention for the work to explore apolitical themes reflecting lived body experiences within domestic spaces. Whiteread's choice of building and the location of the structure saw the work unintentionally become symbolic of social and economic change affecting the area and its people. The public opinion of the piece was unexpected, with the audiences using the surface and surrounds of the work to visually express their embodied sense of place.

Arad's design for the National September 11 Memorial extends the notion of the spatial void, which had been introduced by the removal of the Towers, and the notion of the void underscores the loss of lives as a result of 9/11. The architect uses the idea of absence to represent the victims and the destruction of the buildings. However, the Memorial appears to have become a symbol of the resilience of American power; this may be the result of the work being dictated by varying government and other organisations and influenced by public opinion.

Each of the works seeks to invest voids with meaning and does so in varying ways. Matta-Clark's 'buildings cuts' invited spatial absence into the form of the abandoned warehouse, reconfigured spaces and invited the viewer to gaze both within and beyond the abstracted forms, articulating new spatial possibilities. His approach was subtractive, with his 'cuts' removing elements from the built fabric and creating voids. The warehouse environment did allow the audience to enter the installation, but did not encourage the viewers to physically go through the void with their bodies, thus implying a distance between how one fully participates with the absent spaces.

This distance between the audience and work is also amplified in Whiteread's piece, which stops one from both entering into, and visualising the interior of the solidified void. This tactic is unlike that used in *Day's End*, where the work encouraged the viewers to look *through* the voids. *House* was a sealed space, with Whiteread filling the voids and emphasising an aspect of privacy to the piece.

Arad's design for the Memorial Pools presents spatial voids that are half revealed. The inability to see the bottom of the smaller voids has similarities in common with *House*, while one can see into the larger absent spaces, like *Day's End*. As with Matta-Clark's and Whiteread's works, the audience is not given access to the inside of any of void spaces. The design also encompasses aspects of removal by reference to the destruction of the

Towers and spatial voids in the ground, and then by filling in sections of these raw holes and the construction of the pools.

The embodied experience of the works is also an affect of scale. In *Day's End*, the size of the warehouse and the 'cuts' created a sublime atmosphere that unnerved and awed. The aesthetic qualities of the 'cuts' also allowed light to enter the space transforming the dark, industrial space into a cosmic experience, emphasising the relationship between the environment, body and state of mind. Alternatively, the domestic form and scale of *House* are sizes that one can more easily relate to, and perhaps added to the personal nature of the response from the public. Not surprisingly, Arad's Memorial design has more in common with *Day's End* in terms of its capacity to evoke overwhelming feelings of power and terror, despite the architect's intention.

The analysis has illustrated how critical debate can connect art and architectural works and methodologies in sites and geographies of unbuilding and in-between spaces. Issues that demand consideration of urban life, space and place, ownership and access and politics were raised by each of the works, and these were discussed to illuminate contrasting themes that have arisen in this investigation. Importantly, the research shows how works of unbuilding and in-between spaces can invest meaning in the political narratives of places through the audience's participation and reading of the works' aesthetics.

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